

In the Claims

1.-3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended) A method for controlling a bright annealing furnace for heat-treating a steel strip comprising a step that a partial pressure of steam within an internal environment of the furnace generating a boron oxide is reduced during heating to a value less than about 1×10^{-5} , wherein the step is conducted by lowering a dew point of the internal environment within a heating region of the furnace by insertion of a gas having a hydrocarbon component to the heating region of the furnace.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently Amended) ~~The A method according to claim 4~~ A method for controlling a bright annealing furnace for heat-treating a steel strip, wherein the step of reducing the ~~partial pressure of steam to a value less than about 1×10^{-5}~~ step is conducted by lowering a dew point of the internal environment within the a heating region of the furnace by addition of a chemical compound having a carbon component to the heating region of the internal furnace environment.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of suppressing generation of ~~boron~~ boron oxide in a bright annealing furnace for heat-treating a steel strip comprising maintaining partial pressure of steam within the furnace during heating to less than about 1×10^{-5} , wherein the partial pressure of the steam is reduced by lowering a dew point within a heat region of the furnace by introducing a gas having a carbon component into the heating region of the furnace.

8.-9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A method of controlling generation of white powder in a bright annealing furnace for heat-treating a steel strip comprising maintaining partial pressure of steam within the furnace during heating to less than about 1×10^{-5} to suppress formation of boron oxide compounds from boron contained within steel strips in the furnace, wherein the partial pressure of the steam is reduced by lowering a dew point within a heat region of the furnace by introducing a gas having a carbon component into the heating region of the furnace.

11.-12. (Cancelled)